

VZCZCXYZ0013
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNT #0212/01 0451254
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 141254Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9240
INFO RUEHAA/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3756
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9966
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU 0532
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4370
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0225
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0213
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0248
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3954
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2222
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0898
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1768
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2339
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000212

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SCA/CEN FOR BRIAN RORAFF
USOSCE FOR ELIZABETH KAUFMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL MASS ENRG NATO UZ
SUBJECT: UZBEKS REQUEST NATO ASSISTANCE WITH ROCKET FUEL
DISPOSAL

Classified By: Poloff Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) officials, visiting per the invitation of the Government of Uzbekistan, briefed the diplomatic corps on February 13 after discussing a project to dispose of 1,100 tons of melange rocket fuel. NATO is currently finishing a similar project in Azerbaijan, and the equipment will be available for a project in Uzbekistan this spring. The Uzbek Ministry of Defense acknowledged the fuel "is a major headache," since storage tanks are rapidly corroding from the acidic fuel. NATO officials noted that funding will be required for the project, which could be implemented as a trust fund project with one member stepping forward as a lead nation. Despite the urgency of the fuel disposal issue, the Government of Uzbekistan specifically does not want the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which previously offered assistance, to implement the project. It is typical for the Government of Uzbekistan to compartmentalize military and political organizations, and it likely wanted to avoid the OSCE due to its work in the sensitive human dimension.
End summary.

The problem at hand

¶2. (C) A group of NATO officials (representing the Public Diplomacy Division, the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, and the Central Asia Liaison Officer) visiting at the invitation of the Government of Uzbekistan offered a briefing to the diplomatic corps upon the conclusion of their meetings. The Government of Uzbekistan requested NATO assistance in disposing of 1,100 tons of melange rocket fuel, which is presently stored at a depot in Samarcand Region in numerous 100-ton tanks. A field visit confirmed that the storage is adequate for now, but the disposal issue "is urgent" since the acidic fuel is highly corrosive. Some tanks have already developed leaks, which necessitated the transfer of some fuel to spare tanks. However, there are

only three remaining spare tanks, so the disposal process needs to be completed soon. The NATO team noted "if this isn't dealt with soon there will be accidents," and the Ministry of Defense had acknowledged that "it is a major headache" for Uzbek defense officials.

A convenient precedent

¶3. (C) NATO is finishing a similar project in Azerbaijan, where it is disposing of 1,400 tons of melange rocket fuel as part of a two-year Partnership for Peace project. The project in Azerbaijan will conclude in April, at which time the conversion equipment will be available for the proposed project in Uzbekistan. The process involves adding a base agent, calcium hydroxy, to neutralize the chemical. The end product is a calcium carbonate liquid solution, which is harmless and can be applied to agricultural soil as a low-grade fertilizer. A few Uzbek experts will travel to Azerbaijan in March to see firsthand how the environmentally friendly process works.

¶4. (C) Chris de Wispelaere of the NATO team indicated that the existing site amenities and infrastructure in Uzbekistan are better than in Azerbaijan when that project began, so the start-up would be easier. As in Azerbaijan, they expect to be able to convert approximately five tons of fuel per day, and the project could be completed in about eight months. The Government of Uzbekistan would have to supply electricity for the NATO equipment, but there was no discussion about whether the Uzbeks would also be asked to contribute funds to the project. NATO officials noted that funding is a major issue, but the fuel disposal could be implemented as a trust

fund project with one member stepping forward as a lead nation.

It's urgent, but we don't want OSCE

¶5. (C) The Tashkent OSCE Project Coordination Office informed post last year that it proposed a project to dispose of the melange rocket fuel, but the Government of Uzbekistan rejected the offer. (Comment: The Government of Uzbekistan typically turns down many OSCE project offers in Uzbekistan, but this was clearly not in the controversial human dimension that makes the Government of Uzbekistan nervous. End comment.) Astana-based NATO Liaison Officer for Central Asia Tugay Tuncer specifically noted during the briefing that the Uzbek Ministry of Defense said it does not want OSCE involved in this project. The NATO team noted that even when dealing with educated military officials they have to repeatedly stress that NATO is an entirely distinct entity from the European Union, which had previously placed sanctions on Uzbekistan. OSCE is likely even further hindered by the Government of Uzbekistan's practice of lumping Western organizations together, especially since OSCE often proposes human dimension projects.

Signs of greater cooperation

¶6. (C) German DCM Ruediger Bohn made the point that the Government of Uzbekistan's willingness to approach NATO about this project is another in a string of positive signs noted by the diplomatic community that Uzbekistan seeks warmer relations with the West. The NATO team also noted that the atmosphere in meetings with the Uzbeks has warmed since NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General and Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons last visited, and they added that he is planning a return visit to Tashkent in April. The NATO team also confirmed an invitation was extended to President Karimov to attend the upcoming NATO/EAPC summit in Bucharest on April 2-4.

Comment:

¶7. (C) It is frustrating but not surprising that the Government of Uzbekistan would turn down a non-controversial, fully-funded project from OSCE to resolve an urgent problem. OSCE bad-mouthing Karimov's "re-election" on December 23. While disposing of the melange fuel is clearly important, we think NATO should drive a hard bargain before agreeing to provide any of the necessary resources, and the Government of Uzbekistan should pick up some of the costs.

NORLAND